

1 A N^o
S E R M O N
O N

Remission of SINS,
According to the
SCRIPTURES
AND THE
DOCTRINE
OF THE
Church of *England*.

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With a PREFACE in its Vindication from
P O P E R Y.

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N;
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Printed by J. Matthews, for JOHN WYAT at
the *Rose* in St. Paul's Church Yard. 1712.

Our Saviour did leave with his Apostles, a Power to remitt or retaine Sins, & they exercised it, not only in the Ministrations of word & Sacraments, but also, by casting out notorious & obstinate offenders from the Communion of the Church, and not receiving them again till they had testified their Repen-

This was not a Power granted personally peculiarly to the Apostles, but they were to have Successors in this, as well as in all the other parts of their Office. This Power was transmitted by them, to their Successors, and continues in the Church to this day. But,

Our Modern Separatists will absolve, and those of Rome, assume to themselves, an absolute Power, while the Church of England (as the Primitive Catholick Church was) goes a middle way, and neither absolves any absolutely by her owne power, nor denies to absolve in Christs Name, those who are truly Penitent & desirous of Reformation.

It is in vain for any one, whose Sins are laid upon him by his Bishop, to expect a Pardons Christ in heaven. till he has received Absolution from his Bishop. for no single Bishop can loose what another has bound (except his Successor in case of his Death, or Translation) Yet a Synod of Bishops may do it. For, we find in Acts 15. an Appeal was made by the Church of Antioch from St. Paul & St. Barnabas, to the Apostolical College at Jerusalem, in all Points of Doctrine, therefore much more might such Appeals be made in Point of Discipline, and accordingly the Primitive Church, ever allowed of such Appeals.

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THE many Misrepresentations, which have been made of this Sermon, since it was preach'd in this great Town, have forc'd me to Print it in my own vindication; That all the World may see and be convinc'd, that notwithstanding the strange clamors and Outcries made concerning it, as if it was downright Popery, and contain'd a Doctrine very prejudicial both to Church and State, yet that it contains no other Doctrine, than what was taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, by the Primitive Church, and the Establish'd Church of *England*.

If I had said that the Priest might absolve absolutely, and pardon Sins by his own Authority, that he might remit the Sins of the Impenitent, or retain those of the Penitent, then indeed the Accusation had been just, and I had been guilty of false Doctrine. Or if I had talk'd about Contrition and Attrition, of daily or annual Auricular Confession, or indeed made it any ways necessary for a Man to confess all his Sins to the

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Priest, or allow'd that a Priest might give Absolution upon a Man's bare Confession, or going a Pilgrimage, or giving a Sum of Money to some Pious or Charitable Use, or doing any other thing prescribed to him, which he might do without being really and truly Penitent; then had the Accusation of Popery been just and warrantable. But as I have said nothing of this, and have only taught that *Jesus Christ hath left Power to his Church, to absolve all Sinners, who truly repent and believe in him*, as our Church teaches in the very Words of our Liturgy, in the Office for visiting the Sick; I cannot but think it hard to have this call'd Popish Doctrine, since it is a Doctrine establish'd both by our Convocations and our Parliaments, and has been subscrib'd to by all the Bishops and Pastors of the Church of *England*. So that those who condemn this Doctrine as Popish, condemn not only me, but all the Prelates and inferior Ministers of this Church, who have subscrib'd the same, and are bound to maintain it.

As to what I have said of the Power of retaining Sins, I refer my self to the Rubrick before the Office for the Holy Communion, where the Priest has Power given him, to repel notorious evil Livers from that Sacrament; and to the Practice of all our Bishops in their Ecclesiastical Courts. This Right of the Church, to retain the Sins of the obstinately Impenitent, by excluding them from the Communion of the Church, has been fully maintain'd and vindicated

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the judicious and Learned Dr. Potter, in his excellent *Discourse of Church-Government*, chap. pag. 330. Second Edit. &c. To which I therefore refer the Reader, for his further Satisfaction in that Point.

I had no Thoughts when I compos'd this Sermon, of putting it to the Press, as it now is. I intended, if ever I should see Occasion to publish it, to have taken some more Pains about it, and to have explain'd and clear'd some Passages, and indeed to have enlarg'd it to a just Measure. But after it had made such Noise in the World, and been cried out upon as *Popish*, that I was thereby forc'd to publish it in my Defence, as a Vindication of my self from all unjust Aspersions; I was not then at Liberty to correct or amend any Part of it, but oblig'd to publish it as I preach'd it, that no Man might take Occasion to say, That though the Sermon I printed was not *Popish*, yet that which I preach'd was so. And to satisfy all Persons that the printed Sermon is the very same, Word for Word, with that which was preach'd, the Manuscript is still preserv'd by the Book-keeper, who is ready to give any Man leave to compare them, who shall think it worth his Trouble.

Now because the Sermon was too long to be preach'd at one time, in those Places where I preach'd but one Part of the Day, I omitted that which is enclosed between two Crotchets [] from

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from pag. 13. to pag. 17. And again from pag. 25. to pag. 31. where it ends thus, *God is Respecter of Persons.*

If any Person doubt, whether the Doctrine have here published, was always the Doctrine of this Church, even from the Beginning of the Reformation to this Time: Let him read Archbishop *Cranmer*, the Martyr's, Sermon of *Keys*, Bishop *Andrew's* Sermon on the Text with that which I preach'd on, *Bailly's Practice of Piety*, in that Place, where he shews, how the Sick Person ought to send for some Godly and Religious Pastor, and Dr. *Combe* on the *Common Prayer*. I doubt not but there are many more Excellent Discourses of this Subject, though I have not seen them: But they are sufficient to shew, That what I have here published, has been the Sense of the Religious and Learned of the Church of *England*, ever since its Reformation from *Popery*.

If any Passage in this Sermon may appear Harsh, or any ways Exceptionable at first Sight (though I am not conscious that there is such Passage) I desire the Candid Reader to compare it with what goes before and follows after, where I doubt not but he will find it fully cleared.

I shall conclude this Preface with Dr. *Combe's* Words just before his Paraphrase on the *Absolution*, to be used at the Visitation of the Sick.

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*the Montanists and the Novatian Hereticks
d (like our Modern Separatists) would Ab-
e none: But the Donatists and Audiani (like
e of Rome) assumed to themselves an Abso-
Power, while the Church of England (as
Primitive Catholick Church was wont) goes a
dle way, and neither Absolves any Absolutely
er own Power, nor yet denies to Absolve in
ists Name, those who are truly Penitent, and
re it: And doubtless, if Men were not pre-
iced by Evil Principles, our sick and dying
sons might have as much Comfort by this ex-
ent part of the Office, as the Christians of old
nd in it: And if they rightly knew the Benefit
e of, and were duly prepared for it; nothing
ld better fit them, for a cheerful Passage out
his World.*

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The Montanists and the Novatian Heretics
 old (like our Modern Separatists) would Ab-
 stinence: But the Donatists and Audiens (like
 of Rome) refused to themselves an Abso-
 lute Power, while the Council of England (as
 Primitive Catholick Church was wont) does a
 little more, and neither Absolves any Absolutely
 for ever, nor yet denies to Absolve in
 any: Hence, those who are truly Penitent, and
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 persons might have as much Comfort by this ex-
 ercise of the Office, as the Christians of old
 had in it: And if they rightly knew the Benefit
 thereof, and were duly prepared for it: nothing
 could better fit them, for a cheerful Passage out
 of this World.

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ON

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JOHN XX. 21, 22, 23.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you. As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.

Whose soever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever Sins ye retain, they are retained.

WHEN our blessed Saviour had completed our Redemption by his Death and Resurrection, and had appear'd to *Mary Magdalen* and others, who by his Order had acquainted the Apostles with it; He vouchsafed to make them a Visit himself the very same Day at

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Even,

Even, at such time as they were private-
 Luk. xxiv. ly got together, to enquire of one ano-
 33. ther what was become of him, and con-
 sult where they might seek him; And
 learn who had seen him, and who had not seen him.
 And though they had shut the Doors for Fear of the
 Jews, yet he came in and stood in the midst
 of them. And having given them the Salutation of
 Peace, *he shewed them his Hands and his Side*, fully to
 satisfy them that he was really the same Person
 their Master whom they had seen Crucified. And
 finding them perfectly convinc'd that it was He him-
 self, and no Angel or Apparition, and that they
 were rejoyced at the sight of him: He then not
 only gave them again the Blessing of Peace, but
 also a most ample Commission, saying, *As my Fa-
 ther, &c.* How well does this Commission give
 at this time, set forth Christ's great Love and ten-
 der Care of us? In that as soon as he had accom-
 plished his own Resurrection, he took immediate
 care to provide a Means, by which we might rise
 also from the Death of Sin to the Life of Righte-
 110. 10. ousness. He could not so conveniently
 Is. liii. 10. ly give it before his Death, because
 then *he had not made his Soul an Offering* for
 Heb. ix. 22. Sin. For till then, *he had not shed his Blood*
 Matt. xvi. *without which there is no remission of Sins*.
 19. Therefore it is that this Power was pro-
 xvii. 18. mised before, but not given till now.
 But having made a full Atonement for
 the Sins of the whole World, he judg'd it expedient
 immediately to give his Apostles a Commission,
 his Ambassadors, to reconcile Sinners to
 1 Cor. v. God, committing unto them the Word of
 19. conciliation. From the Words of the Text
 therefore I will shew you,
 First, That our Saviour did leave with his Apo-
 stles, a Power to remit or retain Sins.

Second

on Remission of Sins.

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Secondly, That this Power was transmitted by them to their Successors, and continues in the Church to this Day. And,

Thirdly, How useful and expedient it is, that there should be such a Power in the Church; and the great Benefit it may be to the People, if rightly used and applied.

I. *First*, Then I will shew you that our Saviour leave with his Apostles a Power to remit or retain Sins; That is, to pardon or forgive Sins, or to bind them more closely, so as the Sinner could not be released from his Sin, or pardoned by God, till they had released him also. This Power therefore in other places (for it is spoke of more than once in the Holy Gospel) called the Power of binding and loosing, or the Power of the Keys. Thus upon St. Peter's Confession of Christ, Matt. xvi. and acknowledging him to be the Son of the living God, which he did in the Name of himself alone, but of all the rest, (for the question, *Whom say ye that I am?* was put to all the Disciples) our Saviour promised to him, and with him to the rest, saying, *I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: And Ver. 19. whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven: Whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.* And a little after he took another occasion to repeat and renew his Promise to all, whom he should point to be Governours of his Church, Matt. xviii. saying, *Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven; And whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.* And having thus twice promised to give this Power to his Apostles, immediately after his Resurrection he invested them with it, saying in the words of the Text, *As my Father hath sent me, so I send*

send I you : Whose soever Sin ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. If we consider in what a solemn manner Christ vested the Apostles with this Power, it may convince us that these were not Words of Course, but of great Weight and Moment, intended for the perpetual Benefit of his Church; that Church which they were to collect and settle in all Nations. He twice promised this Power (as I have shewed you) before he vested them with it: And when he did vest them with it, 'twas in a very solemn manner.

First, He blessed them with a Repetition of his first Salutation, saying, *Peace be unto you*: Intimating by this Repetition of his Blessing, that this Salutation was not design'd as a meer civil Complement, at his first Appearance unto them, but that he really design'd, and actually would bestow upon them more than a common Favour.

Secondly, Having, as St. Matthew tells us, acquainted them, that *All Power was given unto him in Heaven and Earth*, consequently that he had Authority sufficient to give them as large a Commission as he pleased, he then lets them know that he would give them as full Power and Authority to his Church as they could desire, and that they should be his Deputies and Vicegerents, to act in his stead. *As my Father hath sent me*, says he, *send I you*. The same Power which my Father hath committed to me, the same do I now confer upon you, whom I appoint to act in my Name, as my Vicars-general, or Substitutes.

Thirdly, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*. Whereby he furnished them with Ability, or Capacity to execute the Power and Authority which he had given them. And then,

In the last Place, he tells them, that He particularly commits to them that Power, which

himself exercis'd here on Earth to forgive Sins: And that as the Son of Man: *Matt. ix. 6.*
Power on Earth to forgive Sins, should they, and therefore he says to them, *Whose*
soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and
whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

And can we think that all this Form, this Solemnity, this Circumstance was for nothing? Did Christ pretend to grant a Power which he did not actually give? Did he so directly, and in such plain Words say, *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained;* and yet did they receive no Power thereby to remit and retain Sins? It may seem very strange, and perhaps sound harsh, and uncouth in your ears, that any Men how Great, how Good, or how Holy soever, should have the Power to forgive Sins. [It is a Doctrine you have been so long us'd to hear, that I have just Cause to fear I shall have great Prejudices to conquer, before I shall be able to convince you of the Truth of it.]

However, since it is a true Christian Doctrine, a Doctrine most plainly deliver'd in the Gospel by our Saviour himself, in three several Places, as I have shew'd you; it is very convenient that you should know and understand it. And if you have not been us'd to hear it preach'd, it is the more necessary that I should preach it to you now; for 'tis my Duty, as of all Pastors and Ministers of the Church, *To declare unto you all the Council of God, and to keep back nothing which is profitable for you.* And sure nothing can be more profitable than to teach you here, how, and from whom, you are to receive Remission of your Sins.

You may perhaps, as the Scribes did, question in your Hearts, and say, *Why doth this Man thus speak Blasphemies? Who can*

Act. xx. 27, 28.

Marc. ii. 6.

forgive

forgive sins but God only? But I desire you to consider, That though God only can forgive Sins, he can and may forgive them in such Manner, by such Methods as himself pleases. And it would be a most high Presumption in us, to tell God how, and in what manner He is, or ought to give us. Are we to choose the Means for Him, which He should pardon us? Are we to prescribe Rules to Him, and say we cannot accept your Pardon, unless you give it immediately your self, and not by the Ministration of Man? If we have been Rebellious against our Prince, and he sends us a Pardon by one of his Servants, shall we unthankfully receive it? It is true, only God can forgive Sins, but he may, if he sees fit, forgive them by the Ministry of Man. And if he give Power and Commandment to his Ministers, to declare pronouncement to his People being Penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their Sins; shall the People think they receive no Pardon, because God does not pronounce this Absolution to them himself? If I compute a Man to act in my Name, that Man's perform'd according to my Deputation, shall undoubtedly bind me: If I give him Commission to release a Debt, his Receipt is my Discharge. And I have obliged my self to ratify and confirm it. Therefore God commits a Power to his Ministers to forgive Sins, he binds himself to ratify and confirm that Absolution which they pronounce, agreeable to the Commission he has given them. And therefore though the Declaration of this Pardon or Forgiveness, which we call by the Name of Absolution, be not only pronounced, but particularly apply'd to particular Persons, by Men of our selves, yet being done by God's Commission who gives them this Authority, it is reasonable should have the same Effect, as if He did it by himself immediately.

and as God may give Commission to Man to
 forgive sins, so may he give him a Commission to
 or retain them: For God may grant Commis-
 sion as large as He pleases; there is no Authority
 prior to his, to limit him in whatsoever he
 sees to do. Therefore as he may give Power
 to Man to declare another's sins to be par-
 don'd, upon due Testimonies of Repentance, so
 may he give him Power to declare and pro-
 nounce that they shall not be pardon'd, till such
 Testimonies of Repentance are given. He
 may give him Power to withhold from him, all
 the Pledges of his Love which he has given, as
 Means and Assurances of his good Will to us.
 The Sinner, thus debarr'd from the Means of
 Grace, shall be also thereby debarr'd from the Hope of
 Glory, if God have seen fit to give such Power
 to Man. That God may commit such a Power to
 Persons as he thinks fit to Commission, to be
 Deputies or Vicegerents, is, I think, indispu-
 table. For if he hath Power to appoint Substi-
 tutes to act for him, (which I think cannot be
 question'd: For who shall say unto Him, what
 thou?) Then may he give these Substitutes
 as large a Power as he sees expedient; so that I
 think nothing can be plainer, than that God can
 give such Power to Men if he pleases. And if he
 give this Power to any Set of Men, yet still
 may properly enough say, That none can for-
 give Sins but God only; since none can forgive them,
 but such as he Commissions to it, and in such man-
 ner as his Commission directs them: And what is
 done by his Commission, may truly be said to be
 done by himself. And if he does not ratify and
 confirm what is done in this Case, according to
 his own Order and Appointment, he may seem
 to consult his Honour, which we doubt not
 will always induce him to maintain, and support
 his

his Servants in the Execution of his own Ordinance. But we know he is unchangeable, and what he has said he will stand by, nor suffer his Authority to be affronted in the meanest of Ministers.

I conceive therefore, that nothing more remains for me to do, than to satisfy you, That God actually given such an Authority to his Ministers. And if he hath done so, this Authority cannot be taken from them, nor ought it to be denied them, although none can forgive Sins but God only. For he thinks fit to forgive Sins by the Ministry of Man, who can say it is unfit or unreasonable, that some Men should have such Power? Now God did give such Power to Christ, whilst he was on Earth to forgive Sins, even as he says *Mar. ii. 10.* Man, is most evident, for he wrought a Miracle to convince the unbelieving Scribes, That the Son of Man had Power on Earth to forgive Sins. And when all Power was given to him both in Heaven and Earth, after he had triumphed over Death by a Glorious Resurrection, and was ready to ascend into Heaven, to take Possession of his Kingdom there, That his Church might not suffer in his Absence for want of Pastors and Governours to take care of it, he committed all Power and Authority, as Head of the Church to his Apostles. This the Text expressly shews, *my Father sent me*, says Christ, *so send I you*. As he had said, with the same Power and Authority that my Father sent me into the World to comfort and govern my Church; I send you and your Successors, I make you my Vicars or Deputies, to act in my Name, and my Stead, and give you Spiritual Power and Authority directive and coercive, which is necessary to your Office and Charge in gathering, fixing and governing Churches to the End of the World; and whatsoever Power and Authority ye have seen me exercise, that

the exercise also. Since then he gave the Apostles all that Power and Authority which he himself was vested with, by the Father with Relation to the Church; (for if he did not vest them with such Authority, he could not send them as he was sent by the Father, *Who gave* *him to be the Head over all things to the Church*) and since he himself so clearly demonstrated, That he had *Power on Earth to forgive sins*; we might very reasonably infer from hence, That the Apostles who were vested with all his Power, as he was *the Son of Man*, should also have this *Power to forgive sins*. I say, this would be but a very fair natural Inference, supposing Christ had actually said no more to them, than, *As my Father hath sent me, so send I you*. However, to take away all Doubt, and prevent all Disputes on this important Subject, (for *Remission of Sins* is the End of our Redemption; the End for which Christ came into the World) he thought convenient to let them know by express Words, that he had conferr'd his Power upon them, saying, *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*. And I would fain know, what Words it was possible for him to vest them with this Power, in a more plain and express manner than he has done in these? And shall we yet doubt, whether he gave them Power to remit Sins or not?]

And we find that the Apostles, after this Commission was confirmed to them by the Descent of the Holy Ghost, on the Day of Pentecost, conceiv'd they had this Power and Authority to remit, or receive sins, and that they preach'd Repentance and Remission of Sins in the Name of Christ. And as they preach'd, so also they baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the Remission of Sins. But you will say, Is this all that is meant by

Ephes. ii. 22.

Act. ii. 38.

the Apostle's Power to forgive Sins? There need not so much to have been said to prove this: No Body denies that they had Power to Preach and Baptize: It is readily granted by all that pretend to believe the Gospel, that the Apostles might

Act. iii. 19. *Speak to all People, and say, Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out: And that when Men gave*

Testimonies of their Faith and Repentance, they might baptize them also: But might not any other Christian do this as well as the Apostles? May not any Man say to another, Repent and be converted, and your sins shall be forgiven you? And if the Person to whom these Words are said by any Man does repent and is converted, shall not his Sins be forgiven him as effectually, as if he had been converted by the preaching of an Apostle? In answer to this, I shall tell you, That altho' these Words *Repent and be converted, and your sins shall be forgiven you*, are easily said, and might in the first Ages of the Church, or at any Time since, be said by any private Christian, as well as an Apostle, yet neither the saying this, nor the Conversion of the Sinner upon the hearing of it, could blot out his Sins: It qualify'd him indeed to receive Remission of Sins, but his Sins were not thereby remitted but by his Baptism, the Ordinance which Christ himself was pleased to institute for the Remission of Sins: And that could be effectually administered by none but the Apostles, or such as they Commission'd for that Purpose. I say, effectually administered, because, though any Man could perform the Ceremony, either of Dipping, or Pouring Water on the Person to be Baptiz'd, yet if he had no Commission so to do, instead of removing Sins thereby, he would rather add to the Weight of them, and profane this Divine Institution. But being done by an Apostle, or by One Commission'd

an Apostle for that Purpose, it was as effectual to remit Sins, as if performed by Christ himself; because as the Text tells us, He sent the Apostles, even as his Father had sent him; That is, with the same Power and Authority, particularly with the Power to remit and retain Sins. Therefore to whomsoever they Ministred the Sacrament of Baptism, which was appointed for the Remission of Sin, that Person's Sins were actually remitted by it. Repentance and Conversion did indeed qualify the Person for receiving the Ordinance, but it was his Sin that wash'd away, or blotted out his Sins. And thus by the Ministration of this Sacrament did the Apostles remit the Sins of those whom they admitted into the Church of Christ.

But though Baptism was appointed for the Remission of Sins, yet it did not make those who had received that Sacrament incapable of sinning again. Whilst Men are Men, they will be liable to Temptations, and will fall into grievous Sins sometimes, well after Baptism as before. And this we find they did in the Apostle's Days, tho' most of those which we read of to have been baptized by them, were baptized in their riper Years.

Witness the incestuous Person at Co. 1 Cor. v. 1. who married his Father's Wife: A Sin so heinous, as the very Gentiles or Heathens abominated it. Such Fornication, says St. Paul, as is not much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his Father's Wife. Yet when this Man testified his Repentance for this great Sin, though he could not be baptized again, yet the Apostle conceived he had Authority to remit his Sins, and accordingly forgave it in the Person of 2 Cor. ii. 10. Christ. From whence it is evident, that

Paul conceived he had the same Authority to remit his Sins, which Christ himself exercised here

on Earth, who said to the sick Man
 Mar. ii. 4. the Gospel, *Thy sins are forgiven thee*.
 And forasmuch as he was sent by *Christ*
 even as *Christ* himself was sent by the Father, and
 had received such Authority, that whose soever
 Sins he remitted, *they were remitted unto them*, no doubt
 but when upon this Man's Repentance, he forgave
 him his Sin in the Person of *Christ*; that Man's Sin
 was actually forgiven him. The Man's Repentance
 indeed qualified him to be forgiven, but it was the
 Apostle that did forgive him. Which certainly he
 would not have done, if he had not known that our
 Lord had given him Power and Authority to remit
 Sins.

Thus then it is evident from the Holy Scriptures
 that the *Apostles* conceiv'd themselves to be vested
 with an Authority to remit or pardon Sins. This
 because out of the Church of *Christ* there is no Remis-
 sion of Sins; therefore, in order to remit the
 Sins of those whom they converted, they first ad-
 mitted them into the Church, by Baptizing them,
 and washed away their Sins by that Sacrament.
 And when Men fell into Sin after *Baptism*, they
 then authoritatively pronounced the Remission of
 Sins, to such as they found Penitent, saying, *I for-
 give, or absolve thee from thy Sins in the Person of Christ*
 or to that Effect. So that I conceive nothing can
 be plainer from their Practice, than that they had
 Power on Earth to forgive Sins. And the Text
 assures us, That *whose soever sins they remitted, they*
were remitted unto them. And when they judged it
 necessary not to administer the Sacrament of *Bap-
 tism* to any Man, or to deny him Absolution for
 Sins committed after *Baptism*, that Man's Sins were
 not forgiven; for so says the Text, *Whose soever*
sins ye retain, they are retained.

They also remitted Sins by the Administration of the other Sacrament, call'd the *Lord's Supper*, which we find the Apostles frequently administred, thereby forgave the Sins of such penitent Christians, as faithfully received the same at their Hands. by the Administring that Sacrament, they gave every faithful Receiver the *Blood of*

New Testament, which was shed for Matt. xxvi. 28.
us for the remission of sins. Thus by the Administration of these Sacraments, and the Absolution given to Penitents, they remitted their Sins: and by with-holding them from the Impenitent, they retained their Sins. Thus far then, I suppose must be granted, that the Apostles Power to remit or retain Sins, might, and did actually reach.

But the Apostles exercised this Power yet further, in the various Punishments and Corrections which they inflicted on obstinate Offenders. Thus Peter said to *Simon Magus*, when he offered Money for the Gift of the Holy Ghost. *Thy Money perish with thee—* A. viii. 20.

Thou hast neither Part nor Lot in this Matter. By which words he plainly cut him off from the Church, in which he had been baptized by *Philip*, and from the Spiritual Benefits belonging to it: Thereby gaining or binding his Sin upon him till he should justify his Repentance. So also *St. Paul*

by his own Apostolick Authority, tho' 1 Cor. v. 5.
present, yet in the Name of *Christ* ordered the incestuous *Corinthian* to be separated from the Church, and delivered to *Satan for the destruction of the Flesh.* And both the Person offending, and the *Corinthians* also were so well satisfied, that this sentence of the Apostle was ratified or confirmed in Heaven, that he expected no Forgiveness there unless he had *St. Paul's* Pardon also, and therefore having duly testified his Repentance, his Brethren at *Corinth* desired

that

that Apostle to forgive him, and so he forgave
 in the Person of Christ. The same Dis-
 1 Tim. i. 20. pline he exercis'd on Hymeneus and
 Titus, whom he also delivered unto Satan
 that they might learn not to blaspheme.

Thus did the Apostles not only forgive Sin
 the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments,
 they retained them also, by depriving obdurate
 Offenders of those Means of Grace: Nor could
 the Offenders which were so deprived or excom-
 municated, hope for any Pardon in Heaven, while
 the Apostles Sentence was ratified, till that As-
 sult had forgiven them, and taken off his Censures
 from them. And St. Paul plainly
 1 Cor. iv. 21. shews to this Power, when he threat-
 ned the Corinthians to come unto them with
 a Rod, and asks, If they will have him come so,
 with Love and the Spirit of Meekness? The Apostles had
 Temporal Power, they could inflict no Corporal
 Punishments, the Rod which they had was a spiri-
 tual One, which could be only to bind or release
 their Sins; which Sentence if it was not ratified
 in Heaven, could signifie nothing at all. But
 the People well knew, that our Saviour had given
 them the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and
 whatsoever was bound by them on Earth, was bound
 in Heaven; whosesoever sins they retained here, were
 retained there also, and therefore most justly feared
 this Rod, more than any Temporal Punishment
 whatsoever. If the Apostle retained their Sins,
 they had just Reason to be satisfied that God would
 never forgive them. For Christ having given
 the Apostles this Power in the Words of the Text, they
 engaged by his own Promise, to ratify and con-
 firm their Sentence, being given according to the
 Rules prescribed in his Gospel: And therefore
 he should not bind in Heaven what they bound
 on Earth, he might seem to make void his own Com-
 mission.

on. Wherefore it was in vain for any one so
 ed, to expect Pardon from him in Heaven, till
 had received Absolution from the Apostle that
 bound them. Consider this is an Ordinance
 of Christ, That *Whatsoever his Ministers shall bind on*
 Earth, or as the Text explains it, *What sins they shall*
 on Earth, shall be retained, shall be bound in
 Heaven: If therefore he forgives those Sins in Hea-
 ven, which according to his own Commission are
 bound on Earth, he makes void his own Ordi-
 nance. It is therefore necessary that such Sins, at
 as are bound on Earth, should be also loosed
 by the Person that binds them, before they are
 loosed in Heaven, or else Christ does not stand by
 to maintain his own Ordinance. And I say 'tis
 necessary they should be loosed by the Person that
 binds them; for if Christ himself will not loose
 them, much less can any inferiour Minister of his
 do. The Bond being ratified in Heaven, cannot
 be loosed till He that bound it looses it also, and
 there is a Promise that it shall be loosed in
 Heaven. Therefore the Corinthian who was bound by
 St. Paul, sought not to be loosed by St. Peter, or by
 any other, tho' they also had preached at Corinth, but
 by St. Paul himself who had bound him. And when
 he had loosed him, he had no Reason longer to
 stay, but that he was loosed in Heaven, having
 Christ's faithful Promise for it. ed on 1st of 11 1710
 Thus I trust I have shew'd you, and I hope con-
 vinced you too, that the Apostles conceiv'd them-
 selves to be vested with a Power of remitting and
 binding Sins. And exercised it not only in the
 administration of the Word and Sacraments; but also
 in casting out notorious and obstinate Offenders,
 from the Communion of the Church, and not re-
 ceiving them again, till they had testified their
 repentance.

II. Secondly, Therefore I will shew you that was not a Power, granted personally or peculiarly to the *Apostles*, but they were to have Successors in this, as well as the other Parts of their Office.

as St. *Matthew* tells us, our Saviour *Matt. xxviii.* promised to be with them *always even to the end of the World.* Besides, if

Power was not to continue in the Church to the end of the World, then neither the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments: For as I shew'd you, it was by the Ordinances that the *Apostles* remitted Sins: Sins are remitted by these Sacred Institutions, even to this Day, or else they must have lost their primitive Nature, and the very End for which they were instituted. And if the Commission hold good as to one part of it, it must do so in the other part also; therefore if *Bishops* and their *Presbyters*, Successors of the *Apostles* have a Right to pardon Sins, by the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments; they must have a Right to pardon them by Absolution, and to retain them also by Excommunication, or other Spiritual Censures, as the *Apostles* had; and their Censures are also ratified in Heaven, as those of the *Apostles* were, so that the Power on Earth can release them, but only he can bind them. And that the Church always receiv'd her self to be vested with this Authority is evident from the History of the Church in all Ages from the *Apostles* Days to this Time. The *Canons* of the Church, from the most early Ages to this Day are most convincing Evidences, that all the Fathers who made those *Canons*, were of this Opinion. For all those *Canons*, tho' made by several Men in distant Ages, and distant Places, are so many Testimonies of this Power of binding and loosing Sinners, being many of them, only so many Rules directed *Bishops*, and their *Presbyters* in the Use and

use of this Power. All the Fathers also, even the most Primitive, who liv'd nearest to the *Apostles*, and whose Writings have continu'd to our times, have taken notice of this Power. It would be tedious to give you the Particulars of what they say, even before Popery came into the World, relating to this Authority of binding and loosing, of admitting and retaining Sins, in that manner as St. Paul did by the incestuous *Corinthian*, whom he deliver'd to *Satan*, for the Destruction of the Flesh, after freed from that Bond, that his Spirit might be saved in the Day of the Lord *Jesus*; which we now call by the Name of *Church Censures, Penitence and Absolution*.

However, I cannot forbear to give you one Instance of the Exercise of this Power, on one of the latest of the *Roman Emperors*, because it is mention'd and approv'd by our Church, in the second part of the *Homily of the Right Use of the Church*.

Theodosius the Great, who was Emperor of *Rome*, having been most highly provoked by the Inhabitants of *Thessalonica*, who had tumultuously murder'd some of his Generals, issued out a severe

Vid. Vit.
Ambrosij per
Baronium ex
Theod.

order for their Punishment, which was executed with the utmost Rigour. For the Officers who were appointed to see this Execution done, came, as it were peaceably to the City, and having invited the Inhabitants, to all appearance in a friendly manner, to see some fine Shows, which they pretended they would exhibit to them: Having got by this Means a great Multitude into the *Circus*, a Place erected for publick Shows and Sports, they brought a Band of Soldiers upon them, and put them to the Sword, without Distinction of Age or Sex; and going into the City also, slew all they could find, whether Strangers or Inhabitants; so that in the space of three Hours they destroy'd Seven

D

Thou-

Thousand Persons: The greatest part of which
 far, were, without Dispute, wholly innocent of
 Crime. *St. Ambrose*, who was then Bishop of
lan, the Place where the Emperor at that time
 sided, (tho' then absent for a little while) upon
 the News of this Massacre, which was made
 by his Order, immediately wrote him a Letter,
 presenting to him the Heinousness of his Crime
 in shedding so much innocent Blood, and for his
 having not taken proper Methods, to distinguish
 Innocent from the Guilty. And when the Em-
 peror came to *Millan*, and would have come into
 Church there; *St. Ambrose* met him at the Porch
 and spoke to him in this manner. "It is very
 " bable, O Emperor, that you know not how
 " great the Slaughter is that you have made;
 " that you have not, since your Anger has been
 " pacified, consider'd the Fact you have committed.
 " For your Imperial Majesty, perhaps suffers
 " not to acknowledge the Fault, and your Power
 " darkens your Reason. But we ought to consider
 " how frail and wavering our Nature is, and
 " ways to bear in mind, that we must return to
 " Dust from whence we sprung: Neither should
 " you be so far deceived by the Splendour of your
 " Purple, as not to know the Weakness of your
 " Body which it covers: Also, that those who are
 " commanded by you, partake of the same Na-
 " ture with your self, and are in that respect your
 " Fellow-Servants. For there is one Lord and
 " King of All, which is God the Creator of the
 " Universe. With what Eyes then will you look
 " towards the Temple of him, who is Lord of all
 " With what Feet will you tread on his Holy
 " Ground? How will you dare reach out your
 " Hands stained with unjust Murder and Blood
 " and take the Holy Body of the Lord with them?
 " Or how will you take his venerable Blood into
 " your

our Mouth, with which, instigated by Fury,
 you commanded so much Blood to be unjustly
 shed? Go then, and attempt not by a new
 crime to encrease the Guilt of that Crime you
 have already committed. But take this *Band*
 which the Lord of All gives Sentence that you
 be bound with: This *Band* has Force in it to re-
 mel the Disease of your Mind, and to restore you
 your Health." The Emperor in his own Ex-
 had Recourse to the Example of *David*, who
 guilty both of Adultery and Murder. To
 ch *Ambrose* answered, Go then and follow him in
 repentance, whom you have follow'd in his Sin. The
 Emperor immediately retir'd and bewail'd his Sin.
 having continu'd under this *Band* Eight
 months, when *Christmass* came, he sat weeping in
 Palace, and *Ruffinus*, one of his chief Officers
 came, asking the Cause of it, he said, *Slaves and*
strangers have free admission to the Temple, there to offer
their Prayers to God, but that Place and Heaven it
is shut against me. For I call to mind, that Sentence
pronounced by our Lord, where it is said, Whatsoever ye
bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven. I will
go to the Bishop, says Ruffinus, and beseech him to
loose you. The Emperor fearing Ambrose would
deny his Request, was sometime before he would
let Ruffinus leave to go to him; however at last
he sent him, and also follow'd himself, attended
by his Guards. Ambrose gave Ruffinus a flat De-
ree. And then seeing the Emperor attended with
Guards, reprov'd him also, and told him, That
coming in that manner look'd Tyrannical, and
he seem'd as if he came to offer Violence to
Priests and to the Church. I do not come, says
Ruffinus, to oppose the sacred Laws, nor to break into the
Temple, nor to use any Violence: But I beseech you to loose
this Band wherewith you have bound me: And that you
will imitate the Clemency of the Lord, who hath open'd

the Door of Mercy to Sinners. Ambrose reply'd, Penitence do you shew for so great a Crime? It is part, says Theodosius, to prescribe the Remedy, and to perform your Commands. Then saith the Bishop Make a Law, that the Execution of Imperial Sentences which relate to the shedding Blood, shall be deferred Ten Days; that the Anger of the Emperor may have time to cool, and he may consider before Execution, whether Orders are Just or Unjust. The Emperor consented and immediately enacted this Law, and signed it with his own Hand. And as soon as this was done Ambrose absolved him. Then they went into the Church, where the Emperor cast himself prostrate on the Floor, repeating those Words of David, *Ps. cxix. 25. My Soul cleaveth to the Dust: O quicken thou me according to thy Word.* Then the Time coming when they were to make their Offerings at the Holy Table, he arose, weeping and lamenting his Sin, as he had done before upon the Ground: And coming into the Chancel, he went, as he had been accustomed to do, and made his Offering at the Altar, and staid within the Rails. But again the Great Ambrose call'd him, and ask'd him if he wanted any thing? The Emperor said, He waited to receive the Holy Mysteries. Then Ambrose sent his Archdeacon to him, to acquaint him, that the Place within the Rails was only for the Priests, and therefore desir'd him to go out, and receive with the rest of the People. For the Purple, says he, makes Emperors, but does not make Priests. The faithful Emperor obey'd the Admonition, and answer'd, That he did not stand in that Place out of any Presumption, but had been accustomed to do so at Constantinople: Therefore says he, I thank you for this Instruction. And when he return'd to Constantinople, which was the Seat of the Empire, and came to receive the Communion after he had made his Offering, according to the

... he went out of the Rails again. And when
Barin who was Bishop of that Church, ask'd him,
 why he did not stay within the Rails, as he had
 been us'd to do formerly? He answer'd with a Sigh,
 I said, I have at last, though with much Difficulty,
 found the Difference between a Bishop and an Emperor. I
 last found a Master that has taught me the Truth. For
Ambrose is the only Bishop I know that is worthy of
 his Name.

It is observable, that there was no such thing as
 Popery in the World, when *St. Ambrose* exercis'd this
 Authority, of binding and loosing upon this Great
 and Good Emperor. For I may well call him
 a Good Emperor, since except this one Instance of
 Cruelty, to which he had very great Provocation,
 and to which he was instigated by the conti-
 nued Importunities of his great Councillors, no
 Prince ever govern'd with more Clemency, and
 testify'd a most sincere hearty Penitence for this
 Fault, and made the best amends for it to his Sub-
 jects, by publishing that equitable Law above-
 mentioned. But it is evident, there was no Popery
 in the World at that time: For if the Emperor
 had ever heard of such a thing as a Bishop of Bishops,
 such as the Pope pretends to be, and has done ever
 since what we call Popery has appear'd, he would
 immediately have applied to him, to have been
 released from that Band wherewith *Ambrose* had bound
 him: And being so near to Rome too, would not
 have waited eight Months under the continued
 fears of Damnation, if he should happen to die
 before he was absolved, without making any Ap-
 plications there for Pardon. It is therefore certain
 that he knew, that neither the Pope, nor any other
 single Bishop had the Power to loose that Band, which
 his own Diocesan had put upon him: And that the
 Bishop of Rome pretended not at that time to any
 such Power, or at least that no such Power was
 gene-

generally thought to belong to him. Neither he a Prince that had been used to be Priest-ruler according to a Modern Phrase, for he had the most part of his time (after he was Emperor at least) at *Constantinople*, where *Nectarius* was Bishop who appears by the Story, to have been one that was by no means like *Ambrose*, but according to *Socrates*, was of an exceeding fair plausible Demeanour, and affected Popularity, and therefore would give no Offence to any by the Exercise of his Authority; which *Theodosius* after his Return from *Millan* gave him a handsome Rebuke, when he invited him to come within the Rails, by letting him know, That *Ambrose alone deserved the Name of a Bishop*: Which was a civil way of telling him that he deserved not. In short, it appears, That *Theodosius* was a good Christian, and as soon as he met a Bishop who had the Courage to teach him his Duty and to let him know the Authority he had to bind and loose, to remit or retain Sins, he submitted to the Band, testified his Repentance in the manner that Bishop prescribed to him, and humbly begged Absolution. Another thing which clears this *Ambrose* from any thing like Popery, is that when he excommunicated the Emperor, he pretended not in the least thereby to diminish his Civil Authority, he own'd him still to be his Sovereign, and that his Subjects every one of them ow'd him the same Allegiance as before: During the eight Months he lay under this Censure, he exercis'd his Imperial Authority, and enjoyed his State, and was attended by his Guards as he had been formerly. He was the same in all respects as to his Imperial Capacity as he had been. Whereas *Papish* Excommunications pretend to affect the Civil Rights of those, on whom they are inflicted. The Pope pretends to depose Princes, absolve

jects from their Allegiance, and to give away
 Dominions to whom they please. But no-
 thing of this was done by St. *Ambrose*, his Censure
 only related to the Emperor's Soul. If there had
 been any thing *Papish* in this Act, the Compilers
 of our Homilies (who were as firm Protestants as
 this Nation had) would not have spoke of it
 with Approbation. And those Homilies being con-
 firmed by our Articles, is a Testimony, That this
 was agreeable to the present Doctrine of
 Church, and consequently that our Bi-
 shops have the Authority which St. *Ambrose* exer-
 cised, and by the Law of God may execute it
 when there is just Occasion, even upon the Great-
 est, there being no Person on Earth so great, as to
 be exempted from this Power. As all Persons of
 any Quality soever, are to be admitted into
 the Church by the same Ordinance; so are they
 to be cast out of it in the same manner:
 God is no Respector of Persons.] and that our Church conceives her Priests, to
 be vested with the same Authority which the Apo-
 stles and their Successors the Bishops and Priests in
 the Primitive Church did exercise, in this particu-
 lar part of Remitting and Retaining Sins, is evident,
 not only from the allowed Practice in the Spiritu-
 al Courts to censure and absolve, which by rea-
 son of the Abuses there too frequent, are not now
 much regarded, but from our very Liturgy, or
 Book of Common-Prayer. When a Priest is Or-
 dained, the Bishop laying his Hands upon him (as
 the Apostles and Primitive Bishops did on those they
 ordained, says, Receive the Holy Ghost, for the
 Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now
 committed unto thee by the Imposition of our Hands. Whose
 sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose
 sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And in our
 daily Service it is expressed, That God hath given
 Power

Power and Commandment to his Ministers, not only declare, but to pronounce to his People being penitent, Absolution and Remission of their Sins. And in Office for visiting the Sick, it is order'd, That sick Person shall be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his Conscience troubled with weighty Matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him, if he humbly and heartily desire after this sort. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath Power to his Church, to absolve sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great Mercy forgive thee these Offences. And by his Authority committed to me, I solve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Thus you may see plainly, That the Power and Authority to forgive Sins, still resides in the Priest of God's Church. That this is no Popish Doctrine but the Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, of the Fathers of the Primitive Church, of our first Reformers who compiled our Liturgy, and of our Martyrs for the Protestant Religion. It is the Doctrine of the Liturgy it self, which has been confirmed by several Synods or Convocations of Bishops and Clergy of this Church, and by several Parliaments of this Realm. To say therefore that God's Priests have not this Power, is to say That Christ and his Apostles, the Fathers and Martyrs of the Primitive Church and our own, Convocations and our Parliaments were all mistaken; which I hope you will not rashly say. Therefore, I will shew,

III. Thirdly, How useful and expedient it is That there should be such a Power in the Church and the great Benefit it may be to the People if rightly used and applied. Now
 Psal. li. 5. I know that we are all conceived and born
 Eph. ii. 3. in sin; That we are by Nature the Children

Truth; so that if we should say we
 have no Sin, we do but deceive ourselves,
 the Truth is not in us. We know also
 that the Wages of Sin is Death: So that a
 Sentence of Death is passed upon all Men,
 that all have sinned. And that the
 consequence of this Death in Sin, is
 Damnation of Hell. We may be sa-
 ved also from the Scriptures, that there is no
 way for us to escape this Damnation, but by the
 forgiveness of our Sins. For till our Sins are par-
 doned God will not be reconciled to
 us. But being made free from Sin, and be-
 coming Servants to God, ye have your Fruit
 of Holiness, and the end everlasting Life. The Word
 of God then plainly teaches us, that till we are
 freed from our Sins, there is no hope for us, either
 that we shall escape eternal Death, or be made Par-
 takers of everlasting Life. But I will not use ma-
 ny Words to prove, what none that pretend to be-
 lieve the Scriptures can deny, which is, that there
 must be a Remission of Sins, or else there is no Hopes of Hap-
 piness in Heaven, or of avoiding the Damnation of Hell.
 Christ who came to conquer and destroy Death
 the Devil, and to deliver us out of their Power
 and Dominion, and to purchase Sal-
 vation for us, has done this, by sa-
 ving us from our sins: For that we are
 saved was the End for which he came into the
 world. This is a Benefit, which every one must
 acknowledge to be very great and extraordinary:
 a Benefit without which, no other Blessing could
 have been obtained for us.
 But what signifies a General Pardon, unless
 Mans are vouchsafed for the Application of it
 to every particular Man? Or what is the Advan-
 tage of the bare Promise of a Pardon, without any
 E Means

1 Joh. i. 8.

Rom. vi. 23.

Rom. v. 12.

Matt. xxiii.

33.

Rom. vi. 22.

Matt. i. 21.

Means by which that Pardon may be sealed and ratified? We are exhorted to repent and be converted, that our sins may be blotted out: But our Repentance and Confession cannot blot out our Sins. They are indeed Conditions of the Covenant to be performed of our Part, to qualify us to receive the Forgiveness of our Sins, and therefore they are necessary for us, and we must be sorry for our Offences, and turn from our evil Ways, or else we shall not be forgiven: But the Pardon and Forgiveness it self is no Act of ours, but of God only, and for this Reason how well soever we may be qualified to receive a Pardon, we cannot assure our selves that we actually are pardon'd, till we can some way or other be assured, that GOD has particularly forgiven Us.

But now which way can we be assured of this, unless God would vouchsafe to call to every particular Man by a Voice from Heaven, and say unto him, *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee*; which would be below the Dignity of his incomprehensible Majesty and Greatness? Or else that he should appoint certain Persons as his Stewards or Deputies, to declare and pronounce this Remission of Sins in his Name, to every Person being penitent? And I have shewed you, *Christ* actually did do in these Words of the Text, saying, *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted: And whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained*. By which Means Men may be encouraged to repent and be converted, not only by Hopes, or with a Prospect of having their Sins forgiven in another Life, but may also have their Pardon so confirmed and ratified even in this Life, that they shall not have the least Cause of doubt, but that it is also at the same time confirmed and ratified in Heaven. For so is our Saviour's Promise.

on Remission of Sins.

35

Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven: And whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven.

Matt. xviii,
18.

You see here the Pardon begins on Earth, what is done here below by the *Servant*, the *Minister* himself ratifies and confirms Above.

And to convince us that he hath made as full ample Deputation of his own Power to forgive Sins, as was possible to be given to Men, he useth no other Word to denote the Power committed to the Apostles, than he does to denote the Power which was inherent in himself. For he does not say, *whose sins ye wish, or pray for, whose sins ye declare to be remitted; but whose sins ye remit*: Using the very same Expression with regard to the Apostles, which he useth with regard to himself.

It is also further observable, That he says not *whose sins ye remit, I will remit, or they shall be remitted*; But *whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted*: Only intimating thereby, that whatsoever they do according to this Commission, shall have immediate Effect and Validity. That at the same time that his Ministers pronounce Absolution to the Penitent, or seal to them the Pardon and Forgiveness of their Sins, by the Ministry of his Holy Sacraments, he himself actually forgives them: And those who rightly and truly receive these Holy Ordinances, have not a bare Assurance or Promise to be forgiven hereafter, but are really and truly forgiven at that very time: Their Pardon is actually sealed, and they are made one with *Christ*, and *Christ* with them.

And what can be more beneficial than this? Can anything be more advantageous to us, than to have an Assurance that our Sins not only shall be forgiven, but that they actually are so? For when a Man has God's Pardon and Forgiveness, thus

particularly applied and seal'd to himself, in Method which God has prescribed in his Word, he has then the most comfortable Assurance founded on the Infallibility of God's faithful Promise, that he shall be sav'd: Because we know, nothing but our Sins can exclude us from Heaven and therefore if our Sins are pardon'd, our Salvation is secure. The Man then who has receiv'd *remission of his Sins*, by the Ministration of the Power to whom *Christ* himself committed the Power to remit Sins, can, if he is at any time tempted to doubt of his Salvation, comfort himself with a stedfast Assurance, that God never fails to ratify his Ordinances, and such Ministrations as are performed by Vertue of a Commission given by him. For the cause, by maintaining the Honour and Authority of his Servant, who acts no otherwise than he has power'd him to do, God really and truly supports and maintains his own Honour, which we know is always jealous of, and will not suffer to be defiled or contemned. The Good Christian may therefore comfort himself with such Contemplation of these, and when he lies under any Temptation or doubt of his future State, let him say,

I have been admitted into Covenant with God by receiving the Seals of the Covenant from the Hands of his Minister, whom he appointed to transact with me in his Name. I was baptized by him in my Infancy, for the Remission of my Sins and so my original Guilt was washed away. I have every Lord's Day, or oftner, upon the holy Confession of my Sins, receiv'd from him the Benefit of Absolution. I have frequently renewed my Covenant at the Lord's Table, and there receiv'd the Body of *Christ* which was broken, and his Blood which was shed for the Remission of our Sins. Thus have *Christ's* Merits and God's Mercy been particularly apply'd to me, by his Substitution

Deputy, whom *Christ* himself has sent with Power and Authority to remit Sins, even as he was sent by the Father for that Purpose. So that having thus receiv'd the Remission of my Sins in particular, by God's *Priest*, to whom he

given the Ministry of Reconciliation, I 2 Cor. v. 18.

have no more Reason to doubt of my Sins being sealed in Heaven, than if an *Angel* descended from thence to tell me

For what is an *Angel* but the Matt. ii. 7.

Messenger of the Lord of Hosts? And so

Scripture tells us is the *Priest*. An *Angel* can

more forgive sins than a *Man*. He can but tell

what God does by his Ministration, and so may

Priest.

And now let me entreat you to lay this Matter

seriously to Heart. Consider with your selves,

how barely to abstain from the Pollutions and Cor-

ruptions of the World, and to pray to God never so

ardently, saying, *Lord have Mercy upon me a Sinner*,

is not sufficient, according to the Promises of God,

to pardon your Sins: It may qualify you to re-

ceive Pardon, but it does not actually pardon

you, tho' you join to it never so full a Trust and

Confidence in the Merits of *Jesus Christ*: But

these Merits, and this Pardon must be applied to

you, in the way that he has prescribed in his Holy

Gospel, by the Ministry of those to whom he has

given Power on Earth to remit Sins, by *Absolution*,

and the Ministration of the *Holy Sacraments*. We

must not say that God will not forgive Sins any other

way but this: He may forgive and pardon, even

when he pleases himself. But this is the way that he

has prescribed in his Gospel, and therefore how-

ever he may remit the Sins of such, (if there be

such) as have not opportunity to make use of

these Means of Grace, we have no reason to think

that he will be merciful to those, who slight and despise

them:

them: Or that he will pardon the Sins of those who will not accept of his Pardon, according to the Methods which he has ordain'd and appointed. Therefore since he has appointed an Order of Ministers to forgive your Sins in his Name, as his Deputies or Stewards, do not condemn this Ordinance but thankfully accept God's Pardon in his appointed Way, and by those Means which he has prescribed.

Do not say within your Selves, I can never believe that a Man who is perhaps as great a Sinner as my self can forgive my Sins: For it is not the Man that forgives, it is not the Man that pardons you, but God himself does it by the Ministry of his Priest, who is the Ambassador for Christ, and appointed in Christ's Name to reconcile you to God. If the Man wicked and naughty, his Commission is therefore naught: And what he does by Virtue of his Commission, shall stand good and firm while he soever becomes of himself.

1 Cor. ix.
17.

St. Paul says, if he do this thing willingly he has a Reward; but if against his Will yet the Dispensation is committed to him. And we have all just Cause to be thankful that it is so. For if the Authority was to have any Dependence on the Piety and Vertue of the Man, we could never be satisfy'd in this Matter. But since the Authority depends on the Commission only, we may be easily satisfy'd in this Point, and rest assured that the Man may be an Instrument to save others, though he himself should be a Cast-away. Let us be thankful to God, who has left a Power on Earth to forgive Sins, whereby every Man upon the Earth, may more easily find the Means to obtain Pardon and Forgiveness. And let me entreat you to make a right Use of these Means.

Grace, by an early bringing your Children to Baptism, that the Original Sin they have contracted by their Conception and Birth, and which is derived to them from our first Parents, may be washed away in that Laver of Regeneration: Be your selves humbly and devoutly to receive Daily Absolution after the Confession of your Sins: And if upon Examination of your Consciences, you find your selves guilty of particular Sins, which may require a particular Repentance, ought then to go to the Priest in private, and make a particular Confession, and desire a particular Absolution: Also fail not as often as you have opportunity, to partake of the Body of Christ which was broken, and of his Blood which was shed for the Remission of Sins: And when you have faithfully confessed thus, you need not doubt but your Sins which are so remitted on Earth, according to God's Ordinances, are also remitted in Heaven. Which God's Mercy grant, that all our Sins may be, through Christ our Lord, &c.

See the Exhortation to the Holy Communion.

FINIS.

An Advertisement relating to Two Passages
in this SERMON.

Since the first Edition of this Sermon, I find two Passages which I conceive to need some Explanation, and which I therefore take this Opportunity to set in the true Light.

The first is p. 23. l. 1. I have said, That it was vain for any one so bound (*viz. whose Sins were upon him*) to expect a Pardon from Christ in Heaven till he had receiv'd Absolution from the Apostle who had bound him, &c. I purposely made use of the Apostle in this place, as denoting a Person of the highest Order in the Church, which we now call the Order of Bishops; and if such a one bind, I conceive no other Person can loose: But I never meant (as I perceive I have misunderstood me) that the Bishop could not release whom the Priest should bind, and therefore used not the Word Priest on this Occasion, but Apostle or Bishop, tho' no single Bishop could release what another Bishop bound, (except his Successor in case of his Death or Translation) yet the College or Synod of Bishops might do it, we find Act. xv. an Appeal was made by the Church of Antioch, from Paul and Barnabas to the Apostolical College at Jerusalem, in a Point of Doctrine, therefore more might such Appeals be made in Point Discipline. Accordingly the Primitive Church ever allow'd of such Appeals.

The other Passage is in the last Page of the Sermon, where I say, If upon Examination of your Consciences, you find your selves guilty of particular Sins, &c. which Words I understand some Persons think I would introduce Auricular Confession, which I am sure was very far from my Thoughts: For I meant no more by particular Sins, which might need a particular Repentance, than such Sins as ought to burthen a Man's Conscience to that Degree, that he cannot quiet it without further Comfort or Counsel, as it is expressed in the Exhortation to the Holy Communion, to which I there refer the Reader. And I should have printed that Passage in the very Words of that Exhortation, had I not been oblig'd (as I said in my Preface) to print it as I preach'd it.